

**2002 Annual Illinois Judicial Conference
Thursday, October 24, 2002
12:00 Noon
Palmer House Hotel
Chicago, Illinois**

Ladies and Gentlemen ---- Good afternoon. My name is Mary Ann G. McMorrow and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Annual Meeting of the 2002 Judicial Council. I am delighted to be here --- I see among the crowd some new faces ---- and some very familiar faces as well. Your very attendance here today suggests to me the level of your commitment to improving the administration of justice in Illinois. Thank you all for coming.

I am pleased to be joined here on the dais by some of my former colleagues, as well as some of the current members of the Supreme Court. Let me first begin by introducing them to you. To my far right is the Honorable Benjamin Miller. Justice Miller is a former chief justice and while on the Court made tremendous contributions to the development of the law in Illinois. Next to Justice Miller is Justice Thomas L. Kilbride from the Third Judicial District, and next to Justice Kilbride, on my immediate right, is Justice Robert R. Thomas from the Second District.

To my far left is former Supreme Court Justice John L. Nickels, with whom I had the privilege to serve for 7 years before his retirement from the Court in 1998. As you know, this past year saw a change in the membership on our Court. After having served as a judge in Illinois for some 29 years, Justice Moses Harrison resigned from office. Justice Philip Rarick, his replacement, who is seated to my left, next to Justice Nickels, brings a wealth of admirable qualities. Not only is he a fine jurist, but also a collegial member of our Court. Last --- seated next to me on my right is my long-time colleague and friend, the honorable Thomas R. Fitzgerald.

I wish to welcome all of the members of the Court, as well as all of you ---- the members of the Judicial Conference ---- to the 2002 Annual Conference and to thank you for your contributions over the past conference year.

Since the 2001 Conference, and beyond the attacks of September 11th, horrific events which continue to occur beyond Illinois' borders have posed some profound challenges for our society. Ongoing acts and threats of terrorism ---- the specter of war against Iraq --- and now, even, the prey of an unknown sniper on more than a dozen innocent victims near and around our nation's capitol ---- demonstrate to each of us that peace and justice can not simply be presumed. They remain ideals which must be constantly fought for and, if they are to be maintained, vigilantly guarded.

As everyday citizens, our daily witness of these events has brought us face to face with the challenges that confront our national and local security. For those of us who are judges, these acts of terrorism and of violence have reinforced for us, not only the significance of the rule of law in the maintenance of an ordered society, but as well, our duty to protect and preserve it. As jurists, our role in confronting these challenges is no less important than that of law enforcement agents, whose duty it is to protect against unwanted intrusion and offensive activities, or that of emergency service providers whose call it is to give aid and needed attention to those who suffer harm as a result of those activities ---- or for that matter ---- the young men and women who may be called upon to go to war and will sacrifice life in the name of freedom. We are joint stakeholders in

charting the future course of our society. As judges, we share in the responsibility in the preservation of peace and justice. It is our responsibility to insist on respect for and strict adherence to the rule of law. It is equally our responsibility to insure and sustain the most efficient and effective administration of our judicial system.

In these difficult times, our court system has been able to carry out its function despite episodes of national and international turmoil and despite, even, this season, of great economic downturn. That is so because of the contributions of those who work in and with the courts --- judicial officers, committees, court administrators and staff. Their ---- or more correctly --- your creativity and enthusiasm, your intelligence and commitment have been the most vital factors in the continuing success of the judicial branch in the administration of justice.

This year, not unlike conference years before, has seen tremendous effort and development toward improving the administration of justice in Illinois. In addition to the work of the several committees which make up this judicial conference and each of the standing Supreme Court Committees, two special Committees are also diligently working to develop recommendations for the Court --- the common goal being --- to improve judicial operations within the state. One committee --- the Committee on Civility ---- is charged to recommend to the Court ways to promote respectful conduct, as the norm, within the legal profession. The other working group is the Committee on Child Custody. With heightened attention to the protection and welfare of children and to juvenile justice issues, this 15 member committee is working to formulate ways in which to expedite review of child custody cases in Illinois. More and more, we have begun to rely on advances in technology as means of insuring the public's access to the courts. A few years earlier we saw the development of the court's website ---- the genesis of which began with this Conference. Now, in very recent weeks, two policies --- one designed to respond to the public's growing interest in electronic access to court records and the other to accommodate the ability to file pleadings electronically --- have been put in place. Finally, much effort continues to be put forward in insuring the highest level of competency in the trial of capital cases. To date more than 496 attorneys have been approved for admission to the Capital Litigation Trial Bar.

This annual conference is the culmination of a year long dialogue among different levels of members of the bench, as well as some participating members of the bar. Because of your efforts, much has been accomplished, but in order to keep pace, your work --- rather, our work must be ongoing. We live in a world that is constantly changing --- changes that present unforeseen challenges and which, at times, may create uncertainties about tomorrow. Regardless of changing circumstances, we must be certain in our resolve --- we must remain committed to the goals and ideals that we as jurists hold in high esteem. It is, after all, our collective efforts toward improving the administration of justice that will show most clearly the value that we place on the preservation of peace and justice in our society.

I encourage you -- as you meet today in each of your separate committee meetings --- to review the work of this conference year and then to bring afresh to develop new ideas, new strategies and new ways of achieving our common purpose. I look forward to hearing the committee reports tomorrow which, I am confident, will clearly evidence your hard work and commitment to improving the administration of justice in Illinois. On behalf of the entire Supreme Court, I wish to again welcome you to the Annual Conference and to express my sincere gratitude for your efforts on behalf of Illinois' judiciary.